AN ESSAY

TOWARDS RESTORING

Primitive Communion,

IN A

LETTER to a FRIEND.

By *J. H.*

Our Diſputes are only about leſſer Matters, about Modes and Forms, about Geſtures and Poſtures, and ſuch like, about which it ſhould grieve a wiſe Man to quarrel. Enquiry into the Conſtitut. Diſcipl. Unity and Worſh. of the Primitive Church, Part 2. chap. 10. pag. 171.

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SIR,

BE *not toſſed to and fro with every wind of doctrine* is undoubtedly very good advice, and therefore, tho', I think, *Try all things and hold faſt that which is good* be as much to the purpoſe, I am not in the leaſt inclined to be angry with you for it, whatever opinion I may have of the application of it; but you will pardon me, Sir, if I can't help being ſomewhat moved at that bold freedom you take with every body, who happens to differ in his religious ſentiments from you. It is very odd that becauſe I am not in every punctilio juſt of your ſentiments, therefore I have not taken due care to inform my underſtanding, and I muſt be inſincere; for what elſe can be the meaning of that expreſſion of yours at our laſt conference, *viz.*

" You could not ſee how a Diſſenter, or one brought " up in that way, could honeſtly conform to the " Church of *England* for a place either of profit, or " truſt." You may poſſibly pretend to ſomewhat of modeſty in this, and ſomewhat of this nature would not have been indecent towards ſo many, who have been otherwiſe minded, whoſe characters in the world might juſtly have demanded it of you; but tho' introduced with a ſhow of moderation, I cannot perceive you are really guilty of it, for this is nothing leſs than a poſitive aſſertion of the diſhoneſty of all ſuch perſons: You can't ſee, you ſay, that is, (after having conſidered throughly the merits of the cauſe it is ſuppoſed, for I would hope you don't give your judgment of any caſe without due deliberation, tho' I confeſs this is grown very faſhionable,) you are abſolutely of an opinion that all ſuch Diſſenters as conform for a place muſt be diſhoneſt, *i.e.* act inconſiſtent with their principles, and therefore muſt be inſincere; a very home charge! and were this true of every perſon in thoſe circumſtances, there would be too much reaſon to ſuſpect it, but if it ſhould appear otherwiſe on a fair ſtating the caſe, you muſt ſtand to the conſequence of it, for I am pretty much of the mind that whatever opinion you may ſtill have of your ſelf, after all your pretences to charity, and declamations againſt Popery, the world will imagine you take it upon you not only to be an infallible judge of controverſies, but of the ſecrets of mens hearts, and that, beſides, being uncharitable, and Popiſhly inclined, your are unjuſt to all ſuch, who, after all your preſumption, have acted very honeſtly herein, who may with as good authority return to your daring and poſitive aſſertion, that they can't ſee how ſuch a declaration can be any way reconciled with your principles of charity and moderation, and how you can poſſibly be ſincere in it; but without recriminating, as I deſervedly

ſervedly might, I ſhall briefly conſider the arguments on which you ground your perſuaſion.

And here you take it for granted (which yet is the foundation of all, if there be any thing in what you ſay) that the terms of communion with the Church of *England* are unlawful, and that 'tis on this principle every body diſſents from it; which latter, if juſt, I confeſs, would prove your point, tho' it would not be ſufficient, if only the terms were unlawful, unleſs the perſon diſſenting had the ſame opinion of them, for one in an error may act very conſiſtent with his principles, and ſo be very ſincere: but if neither ſhould prove true, I hope this will put the matter out of diſpute, at leaſt, with every judicious perſon, whatever you your ſelf may think of it; and I am, in the

1*ſt*. place, very much miſtaken if there be any thing neceſſary to communion with the Church of *England*, that may not be lawfully complied with, but you have ſeveral arguments to prove the contrary, which it may not be amiſs to conſider. And,

1*ſt*. By joining in communion with the Church of *England*, you ſay, we declare our approbation of every thing in the ſervice and diſcipline of that Church, and ſuppoſing this to be fact, (which yet has not the leaſt ſhadow of reaſon in it) pray where is the harm of it if every thing therein be adapted to our ſentiments of things? there can be no crime certainly in any perſon's publickly approving what he likes, if it be not imprudent to do it; but this, you ſay, is not true of any Diſſenter who acts contrary to his judgment herein, and therefore cannot be honeſt: and could you make good your objection, this, I muſt own, would fall hard upon ſuch Conformiſts as could not entertain ſo good opinion of ſome particular things, either in the conſtitution, diſcipline, or worſhip of the Church of *England* to whatever denomination they did belong, whether Church-men or Diſſenters, nay, it would conclude more ſtrongly againſt ſome of her moſt conſtant communicants, who, tho'

they admire her for ſeveral parts of her Devotion, can't yet ſo well digeſt every circumſtance of it; but this I defy you to do, for if this be the caſe, or if our receiving the ſacrament in the Church of *England* ſignifies our aſſent and conſent to, or approbation of every thing belonging to it, it is becauſe, either, 1*ſt*. this is made a term of communion, or, 2*dly*. becauſe 'tis plain from the reaſon of the thing. But the firſt is ſo far from being true, that 'tis not ſo much as hinted at in her ſervice, and the other from being reaſonable, that nothing is more ridiculous and abſurd, conſidering that this is an entire piece of worſhip, which is not at all connected to any other part of worſhip in that Church, and it would be as reaſonable to conclude of any perſon, that becauſe he admires a picture which is exceedingly fine, and well done, therefore he admires another as ugly, which ſtands in the next poſition to it, or becauſe he is pleaſed with a part of it, that, therefore, he judges the whole extremely beautiful and fine: this ſervice of the Church of *England* I admire as much as any one part of her devotion, and as heartily join in it, and yet I ſhould think it a very ſtrange concluſion from hence, that I approve of every individual thing in it, or that I ought to do ſo. Our diſſenting brethren will not, I preſume, deny, but that many weakneſſes and abſurdities, and very extravagant ones, ſometimes may be met with in ſome parts of their devotions; now if any one ſhould repreſent them as abettors of theſe, becauſe they are of the ſame Communion, they would not think themſelves civilly uſed, and yet the reaſon is the very ſame, ſo that I hope you will allow there is nothing in this objection.

2*dly*, 'Tis ſaid that kneeling at the ſacrament is a very improper poſture, and not at all ſuitable to the nature of it; and allowing it to be ſo, and that a table poſture, *viz*. ſitting, according to our cuſtom, (which yet was not the poſture uſed by our Saviour and his Apoſtles) to be moſt agreeable to the nature of an euchariſtical

Feaſt

Feaſt (in which view the objectors ought to conſider the ſacrament if they would make any thing of this argument) 'tis running the objection a great way, and much farther, in my opinion, than can be juſtified to break communion on account of it. For 'tis to be conſidered that no particular poſture is enjoined, or made neceſſary by our Saviour and his Apoſtles, who, had this been a matter of ſo much conſequence, would not have paſſed it over ſo ſlightly, when he inſtituted this ſupper in remembrance of himſelf: he then only enjoin'd his diſciples to do this in remembrance of him, as for the particular modes of doing it, which have been the occaſion of ſo much conteſt in the world, he does not ſeem to have had any, or at leaſt, ſuch a regard to 'em; he partook of it himſelf, leaning, but left no ſuch, nor any other particular poſture in charge to future generations, but every body to their own cuſtoms and prudence, to practiſe herein what they thought fit; and in my opinion, ſuch as pretend this to warrant their diſſent from the Church of *England*, ſeem very little acquainted with the genius and temper of chriſtianity, and ſet too low a value on chriſtian communion, which it is its great end and deſign to keep intire and promote, by inſpiring the breaſts of chriſtians with the noble principles of humility and charity, which *thinketh no evil, hopeth all things, believeth all things*, is ready to become all things to all men for their good, and is abſolutely neceſſary to it; for want of which the whole of chriſtianity has oftentimes been in danger, and the greateſt miſchiefs have enſued: ſuch, as object this, cannot pretend that kneeling is unlawful in itſelf, but only as it is not in the preſent caſe rightly applied, as if, becauſe a thing is improper, it is therefore unlawful, the very utmoſt that can be ſaid is that a table poſture is moſt fitting and convenient, but what then? this does not prove communion with the Church of *England* to be unlawful, any more than that we ought never to do any thing unleſs we do it *ſecundum artem*, or according to the greateſt

perfection

perfection of the art; which would be a ſtrange way of reaſoning, and whatever the objectors may think, would, in the end, conclude as ſtrongly againſt themſelvels, if it did not go a great way toward deſtroying all chriſtian communion. For I very much queſtion whether there be any ſociety of chriſtians, now in being, that have not ſomething or other in their conſtitution which may be fairly ſaid to be improper, which would render it as unlawful to communicate with them; but this is ſo far from being the caſe, that, as in the management of the common affairs of life, 'tis generally eſteem'd a point of good policy in any, to ſubmit to a ſmall inconvenience for the ſake of a greater good, and not to inſiſt too rigidly on niceties, when we may ſpoil a good deſign, or be the inſtruments of much greater miſchief by it, ſo is it no leſs prudent and commendable in the preſent caſe to overlook ſome things, which we may think not to be ſo proper and convenient, where the advantage, or miſchief depending on our different conduct herein, is likely to be ſo great; nay, what was before improper, being now warranted by the laws of prudence, becomes very proper, and not only ſo, but it ought to be done; this I own equally obliges all parties or communions: But, however, if the Church of *England* be a little too ſtiff in the point, this does not at all prove that the Diſſenters ſhould, on this account, totally abſtain from her communion, but rather endeavour, as much as in them lies, to make up the breach, which cannot be more effectually done, than by a frequent manifeſtation, in this manner, of their brotherly love and charity; and ſuch a conduct is ſo reaſonable and good natured, that if any act otherwiſe, whoever they are, and whatever ſubmiſſion they may think is due to them; they muſt not be angry, if every impartial perſon, conſidering the ſtate of their quarrel, judges what they call uncharitably of them, nor if they are repreſented, be they Church-men or Diſſenters

ſenters, as factions in their conduct, and in fact, enemies to religion itſelf, which cannot poſſibly ſo well thrive on their principles.

3*dly*, It is objected tho' this and ſuch like ceremonies are lawful in themſelves, yet they become unlawful when they are impoſed, and this opinion of their's, they judge, is plainly confirmed by the Apoſtle's conduct in the like caſe, who when he was left to his liberty, did not ſcruple a compliance with things indifferent, but when the *Judaizing* chriſtians would have compell'd him, would not ſubmit no not for and hour. 1 *Gal.* xi. 5. But whatever there be in the objection, I think the inſtance, they have fixed on is very ill judged, even ſuppoſing the Apoſtle's conduct is a rule to us in this caſe, and I miſtake very much, if at laſt, it will not rebound on themſelves, for whatever be pretended, the whole of this example amounts to no more than this, that St. *Paul* who on other occaſions was ſo complaiſant, that *to the Jews he became as a Jew, to them under the law as under the law*, 1 *Cor.* ix. 19. 22 Yet when ſubjection to the law was claim'd as neceſſary, he would not yield the leaſt matter, which is a very different caſe, for if kneeling be required of every communicant, it is only under the notion of *expediency or order* and not of *neceſſity*, which was the point the apoſtle ſtuck ſo much at: for the *Judaizing* chriſtians taught that unleſs the brethren were circumciſed after the manner of *Moſes* they could not be ſaved. *Acts* xv. 1. If this had been propoſed to him only, for the ſake of peace, or as a thing profitable to the Church, and expedient to be done under their preſent circumſtances 'till the *Jewiſh* converts were a little more wean'd from their rites and ceremonies, which from their infancy, they had got ſuch a fondneſs for, it is very evident from his after practice, *Acts* xxi. 18, 26. [for this was after his writing this *epiſtle* to the *Galatians*) what he would have done for the publick advantage; but when the

deſign

deſign was to bring him into bondage to the *Jewiſh* law, to mix this with chriſtianity, and *put them on the ſame foot of neceſſity*, this he looked on as preaching another goſpel as he ſtiles it, acknowledgeing others for his maſters beſide Chriſt, contrary to what he had learned from him, and he had always profeſſed; and therefore he would not ſubmit no not for a moment; from whence I think it is pretty plain, how odly the example of the Apoſtle is introduced to ſupport this objection, which I now proceed to conſider, and here it is alledged.

1*ſt*, That on the one hand this is making new terms of communion, and 2*dly*, on the other this is ſubmiting to an unlawful authority; to which I reply that the Scripture allows no man nor any body of men to make new terms of communion, and wherever this is the caſe, this is a defect of that nature that does juſtly warrant our diſſent from them, which was very fully proved before by the Apoſtle's conduct, and is alſo manifeſt from the reaſon of the thing; but the Church of *England* pretends to no ſuch power, it is true you cannot poſſibly have communion in it unleſs you conform to this order of the Church, but this is not becauſe ſhe judges you unfit or want any of the eſſential qualifications for chriſtian communion, which would indeed be making new terms of communion if ſhe did, but becauſe it is contrary to the eſtabliſh'd order of that body; and herein ſhe does not claim to herſelf any more power or authority than any other ſociety; ſo that if it be unlawful on this account to have communion with the Church of *England* it is as unlawful with other Societies; but it is very ridiculous to ſuppoſe that every ſociety has not a power to concert and eſtabliſh its own laws, as they ſee it moſt for their advantage, or that there c n be indeed any ſociety without it, and why the Church of *England*, or the members of it, have not as much right to agree on their own Laws, whether

they are enacted by the body, or only a Part of it, and whether this be by a general conſent, or act of parliament, I cannot imagine: the outcry againſt a national Church, and the power of the magiſtrate to interpoſe in things of this nature, I am ſenſible, has been very great, and ſuppoſing a ſociety, formed on this foot, to be juſtly liable to many more exceptions and inconveniencies, than one formed on the foot of a majority, which now a day is, *rara avis in terris, a thing very rarely to be met with*, even amongſt the Diſſenters themſelves, where is the modeſty of refuſing that power to them of agreeing, or eſtabliſhing their own laws, which they lay claim to themſelves? 'Tis a queſtion of another nature, how far this will warrant our diſſent, or whether this be a defect of ſo great conſequence? when 'tis plain we may have communion without conſenting to the fitneſs of it, tho' we cannot without a compliance with ſome of its orders, and here only the unlawfulneſs of the authority, and the impoſition can be objected, which, if there be any thing in it, may be urged againſt them with as much, if not greater advantage; for tho' the form of an act of parliament be wanting in their conſtitution, the authority is alike, their laws are as unalterable, and every communicant as much tied down to a conformity to them as if eſtabliſh'd by a law, only with this *difference*, the Church of *England* pretends to a power of decreeing rights and ceremonies, and acts herein conſiſtent with her principles; the Diſſenters *diſown all ſuch authority, and yet are as fond of impoſitions, and as inflexible in every point of their diſcipline*, thinking to excuſe the inconſiſtency of this by their want of the formality of it, tho' it be the very ſame in effect; and to every conſidering perſon, notwithſtanding all the Diſſenters clamours againſt impoſitions, which, I confeſs, in any chriſtian ſociety, make but an odd ſound, I believe it will appear that their communion, for the main, is clogg'd with much greater difficulties

than that which they ſo much oppoſe, and whatever power the Church of *England* claims, in points of an indifferent nature, I reckon tis her peculiar excellency, and herein ſhe comes neareſt the example of the primitive Church, that the doors of her communion are ſo wide and extenſive: 'Tis by this means chiefly, whilſt other communities are diſtracting, and worrying one another like wolves, and running things into the utmoſt confuſion, thro' their peeviſh and uncharitable contentions, ſhe enjoys ſo great peace and tranquillity, which nothing but a more extenſive charity can effect, and, in which reſpect, however ſhe be deſpiſed by ſome for it, I cannot but look on her to be the glory of all that are about her And now I have done with this objection, by which time, I preſume, I have made it appear that there is nothing unlawful in the terms of communion in the Church of *England*, and that a man may very honeſtly communicate with it; but this you inſiſt on, no Diſſenter can do, becauſe 'tis on account of the unlawfulneſs of the terms he ſeparates from it, which, if true, will, for all that has been hitherto ſaid, abundantly make good your aſſertion, that no Diſſenter can honeſtly conform for a place, either of profit or truſt. For, certainly, if the terms of communion with any Church be judged to be unlawful, it is not in the power of any poſt whether it be to promote our own, or a publick good, with what deſign ſoever we engage in it, to make them otherwiſe to us: But before we determine with you, we will conſider what truth there is in this, for if the contrary can be made out, this will put an end to the whole diſpute, and you muſt acknowledge yourſelf to have been under a very grand miſtake. And

1ſt. It will eaſily be allowed, that 'tis on this account many do diſſent from the Church of *England*, ſome of whoſe principal ſcruples I have juſt now weigh'd and

and conſider'd, but I am very well aſſured, if it be poſſible for others, perhaps of as much penetration as yourſelf, to come at as good a judgment of perſons and things, that there are multitudes who do not; nay, give me leave to ſuggeſt to you, that I am not without ſome apprehenſion, that the caſe is otherwiſe with the greateſt part of the Diſſenters, or, at leaſt, with the moſt conſiderate and rational part of them, who keep off from communion with the Church of *England*, either on the account of more and greater impoſitions, or becauſe they originally belonged to a private ſociety, neither of which, however, they don't reckon to be a ſufficient bar from communicating with, or ſhowing their chriſtian charity towards their brethren whenever they conceive there is a neceſſity for it; but you have three reaſons from whence, you judge, you have fairly drawn this concluſion.

1*ſt*. Becauſe you yourſelf diſſent on this foot.

2*dly*. Conformity to the Church of *England*, at the ſame time any one is in communion with a ſeparate ſociety, is as inconſiſtent as the ſervice of two maſters, and a ſort of monſter in religion.

3*dly*. This is evident from their own practice. But as to the

1*ſt*. Suppoſe you diſſent from the Church of *England* on this foot, how is it therefore plain that every body elſe does? I mean how does this appear ſo plain to your own underſtanding? (for I don't expect you ſhould attempt to clear up this to mine, or any body's elſe) you can't imagine, you ſay, what other grounds any can have for their diſſenting from the Church of *England*, but what then? is there, therefore, no other ground? I hope you don't only imagine, but believe, ſometimes, gen-

tlemen of your extraordinary imagination are generally the ſtrongeſt believers, and pray what evidence have you that your imagination always points right? you may be a good enthuſiaſt enough, but if I may imagine as well as you, you are not infallible, and give me leave to obſerve, that tho' men of your ſtamp are always the moſt confident, they are ſeldom the beſt judges, and, therefore, with what pleaſure ſoever you imagine yourſelf, this will hardly be ſatisfactory to any body elſe, but without detaining you any longer with this, I'll proceed to your ſecond argument, and

2*dly*, If what you refer to were a parallel caſe, *i. e.* if holding communion with the Church of *England*, at the ſame time a perſon is in communion with a ſeparate congregation, was ſerving two maſters that were carrying on two oppoſite intereſts, or as 'tis explain'd, *ſerving God and Mammon*, *Chriſt* and *Belial*, this would be abſolutely inconſiſtent, and no man could poſſibly be ſincere in the ſervice of both, he muſt neceſſarily hold with the one, and deſpiſe the other; but this is not the caſe, for, notwithſtanding our different ſentiments concerning ſome things of leſs conſequence, and we belong to various communions, however uncharitably the zealots of all parties may judge of it, we are in fact but *one communion*, tho' differently diſtinguiſhed, ſerve but one maſter, and are carrying on one and the ſame deſign; and where the great inconſiſtency of this lies, or the prodigious monſtroſity of belonging to various communions, thus conſtituted, I cannot be convinced; if I may judge, 'tis abundantly more monſtrous and inconſiſtent that ſuch ſmall differences about things of *leſs importance*, and not in *doctrinals* neither, but points of *diſcipline* and *order*, and theſe by the *confeſſions of all parties of an indifferent nature* ſhould be the occaſion of any breach in communion amongſt chriſtians; and yet to ſuch a height is this controverſy grown, that too many

many on both ſides look on one another not only as profeſſing a different religion, but, at leaſt, in as bad a ſtate as Infidels and Heathens, if not in a ſtate of damnation, RARE CHRISTIAN CHARITY! unleſs the uncovenanted mercy of God does prevent it: I don't deny but that different ſentiments of the eſſentials of religion, eſpecially when there is an attempt made to impoſe them, may juſtly give occaſion for a different communion, but when Chriſtians, profeſſing the ſame religion, agree in all the fundamental articles of it, and only differ about ſome points of decency, and order in the management of it, I cannot apprehend what foundation there can be for it, if there be any 'tis becauſe, either

1*ſt*. An uniformity in our religious ſentiments is neceſſary, or,

2*dly*, This is a difference of that moment, that on one ſide or other it requires a breach. But as to the

1*ſt*. I apprehend whatever ſtrenuous endeavours have been made uſe of to effect it, or bring about an uniformity in mens ſentiments, very few Proteſtants, at leaſt, have the front to own this, and the 2*d*. has been already conſidered: and however wild and licentious the opinion may be repreſented by ſome men, who ſerve their ends by it, and thrive beſt when differences and animoſities amongſt chriſtians rage moſt, this was the bleſſed ſtate of chriſtianity when it was firſt planted in the world, for tho' ſome ſince being for *Paul*, and others for *Apollos*, ſome for maſter *Calvin*, and others for *Arminius*, depending on their authority, and placing a peculiar ſanctity in their diſtinctive ſentiments, have, as if Chriſt was divided, formed themſelves into as many

many different communions, or rather religious CABALS as they have had leaders to head them, chriſtianity at firſt conſiſted only of one head and one body, which was compoſed of different parts or communions for their mutual conveniency, but not out of any contempt of, or diſſaffection to each other's communion, tho' *even then* they could not think all alike in religion:

It is true the ſame ſpirit of uncharitableneſs, which has ſo much prevail'd ſince amongſt perſons of different communions, began to exert it ſelf in thoſe times, particularly in that famous controverſy about meats drinks and days, between the *Jewiſh* and Heathen converts which we have an account of *Rom.* xiv. but the Apoſtle, who had become all things to all men himſelf, and beſt knew how to judge of theſe matters, does not once adviſe to the leaſt breach amongſt them, even tho' that was of much more conſequence to chriſtianity than this can poſſibly be, for eating herbs and making a diſtinction between meats, drinks, and days, however trifling it be look'd on, was certainly a point of the *Jewiſh* religion, which chriſtians were under no manner of obligation to mind, but rather on all proper and prudent occaſions to teſtify their diſlike of, ſo that the controverſy was not whether this or that part of the chriſtian worſhip ſhould be obſerved in this or the other manner, but whether ſome part of the *Jewiſh* religion might not be tolerated for a ſpace, 'till the converts, from thence, better underſtood their chriſtian liberty, or whether chriſtianity might not admit of a ſmall mixture of *Judaiſm* under their preſent circumſtances? This was the ſtate of their quarrel, which is vaſtly different from ours, yet notwithſtanding, as I before obſerved, the Apoſtle, tho' he was fully convinced of his chriſtian liberty in ſuch matters, knowing very well that ſhould he inſiſt much

much upon it, this might be attended with the moſt diſmal effects on chriſtian charity, a cauſe which lay much nearer his heart than either *conformity or nonconformity* to things of this nature, does not ſo much as once hint at a ſeparation on this account, but on the contrary adviſes them in the moſt pathetick manner to bear with, and forbear one another, and for his own part declares, tho' he knew his liberty in thoſe caſes, he was ready to deny himſelf, and make a ſacrifice of it for the welfare of others, and hints to them this was moſt correſpondent to the genius of chriſtianity, and that ſuch were the ſtronger, and moſt judicious chriſtians that could do ſo; for tho' every chriſtian does well, when he contends *earneſtly for the faith that was once delivered to the ſaints*, and it were to be wiſhed that the chriſtian worſhip and diſcipline, both as to this ſubject of communion, and every other part of it, was in every circumſtance made conformable to the example of the primitive Church; yet charity is of much greater importance than ſo much zeal about ceremonies, which have no ſuch *neceſſity* ſtamp'd upon them: So that the notion but of one communion amongſt different ſocieties, and acting conſiſtent with it, is not ſo monſtrous as ſome would make it, but rather moſt agreeable to the nature and deſign of chriſtian charity; and were this univerſally practis'd, however ſome private ſocieties might ſuffer in their particular intereſt by it, I cannot forbear thinking, that nothing would help more to retrieve the ſinking ſtate of chriſtianity and reſcue it from that load of perſecution, which in ſo great a variety of forms, does almoſt every where oppreſs it; it would effectually pluck up that root of bitterneſs there is in the hearts of moſt chriſtians towards one another, and ſhortly render it no longer neceſſary to change our particular communion, but only when prudence ſhould direct us: But were it as abſurd as

it

it is repreſented to be, this would not in the leaſt affect the honeſty of any perſon, who could not entertain the ſame opinion of it. Again,

3*dly*, The practice of the Diſſenters, which is ſeldom, or never, to communicate with the Church of *England*, only when they conform for a place, is a plain indication that they judge the terms of communion unlawful; and you reckon this is ſo evident from hence, that it does not ſtand in need of more proof, and was it ſo clear as you imagine it to be, I grant there would be no need of any farther debating this matter, but I cannot be of the mind that this practice of theirs, which is fairly enough repreſented, is ſo plain an evidence of it, nay, to be free with you, that 'tis any proof at all, and the very utmoſt I ſee in it, ſo vaſt is the diſproportion of our underſtandings, is, that tho' they prefer their own communion, they don't think it unlawful on ſome valuable conſideration to conform; this, I confeſs, is plain enough from their practice, but not by any means that they judge the terms of communion with the Church of *England* unlawful; but, however, I will conſider what proof you have of it, and the reaſons aſſign'd are,

1*ſt*. That 'tis notorious they would not, were they not obliged to it. And

2*dly*, If this was not the judgment they had formed of the terms, they would oftener communicate with it. And

1*ſt*. Suppoſing they would not were they not obliged to it, this does only demonſtrate, that tho' they looked on this act to be lawful, they would not comply

with

with it 'till they had ſome other reaſon for it, and not in their judgment the unlawfulneſs of it, and

2*dly*, As for their communicating oftner with the Church of *England*, did they not think it unlawful, a thing which is very much talked of by ſome, I cannot, with ſubmiſſion, ſee any thing in it, for if it be allowed on all hands that a man, for a valuable end, may do a lawful action, which he never did before, and never intends to repeat but on ſome ſuch like important occaſion, I can't ſee why a perſon may not occaſionally conform for a place either of profit or truſt, where the circumſtances are every way alike, tho' he never did it before, and never intends to repeat it but when the like occaſion may offer; but here it will be demanded, if any one believes the terms of communion to be lawful, to what purpoſe then does he diſſent? to which it is ſufficient to reply, that all lawful things are not expedient, there are a thouſand things which may be lawfully done, but we don't think ourſelves, therefore, under the leaſt obligation to do them; it would admit of a very different conſideration how far the notion of better edification, or of fewer impoſitions, or ſome other reaſon of the like nature, ſuppoſing theſe juſt, which may very well be doubred of, will juſtify the conduct of the Diſſenters, or whether more brotherly love and communion is not a matter of much greater importance, but neither the one nor the other does affect the main point in debate; a man may judge the terms of communion to be lawful for all this, and the other is ſo far from proving it unlawful to conform on ſome emergent occaſion, that 'tis really an argument for it; in which caſe we are no more obliged to conſtant or frequent communion, than a man who does an innocent action for a good end, is obliged to repeat it, when the end that determined him ceaſes, and the

condition of the obligation is taken of; which, I conceive, is a full anſwer to this terrible objection, with which I had ſhut up this diſcourſe, but there is one argument more behind, which, tho' you have not taken notice of, is yet a very popular one, and frequently made uſe of to prove the diſhoneſty of all ſuch perſons, particularly, who conform to the Church of *England* for a place of profit, which, therefore, it may not be improper to take notice of, tho' otherwiſe it be of no conſequence, and here you have it in its full ſtrength.

Laſtly, Nothing is more demonſtrable then that all ſuch as conform occaſionally for a place, act on the principle of intereſt, and, therefore, they muſt be diſhoneſt. And from hence it is the Diſſenters are frequently repreſented as perſons of the moſt ſelfiſh principles, and whatever they pretend, that will do any thing for their advantage; a charge of a very high nature, and therefore to be very fully proved before fixed on any perſon, much leſs on ſuch a body of men, which, yet, tho' I would not undertake the task of vindicating every individual perſon of that denomination from this aſſertion, believing them in all reſpects, to be men of like paſſions with others, I cannot be of the mind, it is ſo clearly proved from hence, nor, indeed, that the honeſty of any one of them can be fairly called in queſtion on this principle; for granting the premiſſes from whence this concluſion is drawn to be juſt, and that all ſuch perſons acted on a principle of intereſt, or had a regard to their temporal advantage in this act of communicating with the Church of *England*, tho' no man can be juſtified in doing evil that good may come, and no end, how valuable ſoever, will bear us out in the commiſſion of a vile action, yet if the action be good

and

and the end alſo be good, there can be no doubt of the lawfulneſs and honeſty of it, and if there be nothing unlawful in the terms of communion with the Church of *England*, or which they could not at any other time have readily complied with, I wonder where the crime of it lies, if it be any where, it muſt be in this, becauſe ſuch aim at their temporal advantage herein, but for the very ſame reaſon godlineſs it ſelf would become a crime, becauſe it has a promiſe of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come; and people embrace it for this end amongſt others, that, generally ſpeaking, 'tis the moſt likely way of thriving in this world; and if this may be lawfully done, there can be no doubt of the reaſonableneſs of conformity when the end is not ſo much to promote a private as a publick advantage, or if the end was honour, with which ſuch as conform for a place of truſt, are ſometimes maliciouſly enough charged, ſuppoſing it to be lawful, as it is certainly, and a very valuable end, a man may very honeſtly do it for all that, as well as for his private advantage, which was ſhewn to be lawful before; but the queſtion is not neither ſo much, whether a man may honeſtly have regard to ſuch temporal motives in receiving the ſacrament, as there is no doubt but he may as well as in being religious, but only in ſuch a place, which proves all objections of this nature to be the more triffling, for this plainly ſhews that this is nothing but a point of prudence, in which reſpect, every unprejudiced perſon muſt think him worthy of the higheſt blame, who ſhould neglect ſuch an opportunity of promoting his own, whether his circumſtance in the world ſo neceſſarily required it or no, bnt more eſpecially the publick advantage, which, as a Chriſtian, and a member of ſociety, every man is obliged to promote by all the lawful and honeſt means

that he can. 'Tis a very different thing when any receive the ſacrament in the Church of *England*, merely as a qualification for a civil employment, and have nothing in view by it but their worldly advantage, this is proſtituting, with a witneſs, one of the moſt ſacred inſtitutions of chriſtianity, and ſuch a conduct cannot well be too much cenſured; but a regard to this along with other ends, where there is every other qualification for it, carries not the leaſt diſhoneſty with it. Tho' after all, I believe it will be a pretty difficult matter, ſo great are the prejudices and weakneſſes of human nature, for ſuch perſons to clear up their integrity to the conviction of all their oppoſers, and though they act never ſo honeſtly, and are never ſo well ſatisfied in their own conduct, they muſt expect to lie under the imputation of hypocriſy, and to have a load of dirt and infamy thrown upon them; on which account, but, more eſpecially, on account of the temptation ſo many lie under of prevaricating in a matter of ſo great importance, to the endangering of their eternal ſalvation, (which conſideration alone is enough to make ones heart bleed in compaſſion on the multitudes that daily and conſtantly do it.) I could wiſh the wiſdom of our LEGISLATORS did think it a proper time to enquire into the merits of the cauſe, and conſider the fitneſs of it, how commendable ſoever the original intent was, and the advantage that has accrued by it to the nation in ſo many years experience; and on the other hand, I as heartily deſire that people of all denominations would ſo improve in their conduct and approve of them ſelves by their obedience to God and the King, and all that are ſet in authority over us, and by a ſincere love and charity toward one another, as, in ſome meaſure, to merit this favour at their hands; which whenever they do, I am perſuaded from the known generoſi-

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ty and goodneſs of our ſuperiours; there will be nothing wanting in them, that is neceſſary to the publick good and advantage. I remain,

S I K,

Your ſincere Friend,

J. H.

POSTSCRIPT.

ALTHOUGH I have aſſerted the lawfulneſs of communion with the Church of *England*, and am fully perſuaded the Diſſenters have no juſt ground for their ſeparation, on the account of her impoſitions, yet, leaſt any ſhould imagine I intended hereby a vindication of the fitneſs and propriety of them in a free ſtate of chriſtianity; I think it neceſſary to declare that I ſhould heartily rejoyce if every thing of this nature was laid aſide, if all ſuch who ſcruple a conformity to indifferent ceremonies were left to their full liberty herein, but that, as theſe things have been of a long ſtanding in the Church, and it is not ſo eaſy a thing to diveſt human nature of all its prejudices at once, eſpecially of ſuch as are almoſt connatural unto us, I cannot think it would be prudent to puſh at this, under our preſent circumſtances, leſt, whilſt we endeavour to extinguiſh one flame, which may be ſuppoſed, after ſo long a time, to have loſt much of its ſtrength, we ſhould kindle another much more dangerous and deſtructive: Was the controverſy about the eſſentials of religion, I grant ſuch conſiderations ought not to avail any thing; and in ſuch a caſe it would be no way criminal, to attempt, publickly, a reformation of all groſs fundemental errors, tho' they had lain never ſo long dormant, and the peace, or rather the *Lethargy* of the Church, was likely to be very much diſturbed by it: But as, God be thanked, this is not the ſtate of our quarrel, which is only about things of an inferior nature, or the conveniency of particular

ticular rites and ceremonies; I ſay, I cannot judge it would be prudent, but rather very raſh and preſumptious to puſh at it under the preſent ſtate of things: And whatever our diſſenting Brethren may think, they would act a very chriſtian part, as they cannot be under any ſuch apprehenſion, if they would generouſly throw up the argument of greater perfection, which they ſo ſtiffly inſiſt on, for the ſake of the peace of the Church, which is of much greater importance. Tho' I would moſt humbly beſeech the governours of our Church, as there is ſo much offence taken at the impoſition of indifferent things, and every part of our devotion would be perfect without them, that they would do what in them lies towards moderating the prejudices of all ſuch as are more immediately committed to their charge, againſt a farther reformation of theſe things. The condeſcention, how great ſoever, would be no greater in them, than in the apoſtle *Paul*, who endeavoured to *pleaſe men in all things, not ſeeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be ſaved*: And 'tis no more than he adviſes Chriſtians to do, *look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others*, and *we that are ſtrong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not pleaſe ourſelves*. And I am not without hope, if due care and prudence were uſed about it, however inconvenient ſuch an open attempt would be at preſent, that the difference might, at laſt, be accommodated, to the infinite honour of all ſuch as ſhould be inſtrumental in making up the breach, the profit of our holy religion, and the publick good and advantage: Than which there can be no greater motives to begin a work of this nature, whenever there ſhall be a convenient opportunity for it.

F I N I S.

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Juſt Publiſh'd

AN impartial Hiſtory of *Michael Servetus*, burnt alive at *Geneva* for Herely. Sold by *J. Roberts*, in *Warwick-lane*,